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Grinning and Bearing It

09.18.2009 | Campus and Community, Faculty, Students As the campus cleanup and power restoration has progressed, students, faculty and staff have come together to maintain safety, cope with shortages and make the most of an inconvenient situation, said Sister Annette Schmeling, R.S.C.J., vice president for student development and dean of students.

Schmeling, who lives among her charges in the south student neighborhood, said the neighborhood over the past few days has had an almost Norman Rockwell idyll, with students grilling out, studying and singing on their porches. They've been largely good-natured, and as needs arise, they're willing to help.

For example, when the leaders of the Student Government Association called public safety with an offer of help, public safety took them up on it.

"Chief (Bruce) Burt called Monday at 5 p.m. and asked us to meet at 6 p.m. on Kiefaber," said SGA President Emi Hurlburt. "With an hour's notice, we had about 25 of our 65 members there to help."

They delivered bottled water to Campus South, which was in the dark and short of water pressure, and flashlights to the north and south student neighborhoods with the reminder not to use candles or any other open flame. As night fell, the flashlights ended up as much a source of entertainment as they were a source of light for the 2,400 students without electricity, Schmeling said: possibly the world's largest game of flashlight tag.

Faculty and staff have worked hard to keep the academics on course, and Joseph Saliba, interim provost, praised them for their extra efforts.

"All has not worked out perfectly," he told them, "but given the impact of this regional emergency, the outcomes at UD have truly been impressive. The entire campus has pulled together, and we've been able to continue our students' academic pursuits while still addressing the critical issues of health and safety."

On Sunday, when students needed lighted places to study, Kathy Webb, dean of University libraries, extended the Roesch Library's hours to 5 a.m. and took a shift Sunday night. It was busier than normal with the power outage. When students asked for more lighted space, UD happily obliged.

"That was a magic moment," Schmeling said. "They wanted more academic space to study, and we opened up two more buildings."

RecPlex has been open each night of the outage as a place for students to sleep, and on Wednesday, student development and the neighborhood fellows — student resident advisers — both fed the hungry and comforted the afflicted with a barbecue and resident meeting in the north student neighborhood.

Some faculty have offered respite from the darkness.

Shauna Adams, associate professor of teacher education, offered her family's home to her sophomores who live in Campus South. None took her up on it, but the gesture was borne of the Golden Rule.

"My daughter is working in Kansas City for the art museum there, and I hope that if she were in a similar situation, someone would do the same for her."

Schmeling received a similar offer. Monday night, when she called a student to find out how things were going, the student learned that Schmeling was still without electricity.

"She said, 'Sister, we have power. You can come and stay with us.' I thought that was so nice. These students offered me a

place to eat and sleep." She declined, but she appreciated the kindness.

The absence of electricity has brought about some old-fashioned entertainment. Senior civil engineering student Kyle Fortman said he and his housemates, all engineering majors, were bored Monday night until Mark Laubie, a senior in mechanical engineering, pulled out a Scrabble board. They played all evening on the porch. Laubie, who can both spell and do thermodynamics, won, hands down.

Schmeling said the students' sense of humor has been refreshing.

On Sunday during the storm, a public safety officer patrolled the streets of the south student neighborhood, announcing through a bullhorn, "Stay in your houses. Be safe. This is Officer Mike." Some students have taken to repeating the bulletin to one another in proceeding days, Schmeling said. It might be the friendliest mockery of the establishment ever witnessed.

"Students have just responded so well to the crisis," Schmeling said. "Our students are acting like adults, staying focused on what they're doing and why they're here. ... I just need the students to hang in there with me a little bit longer. They've been doing so well."

Some other storm tidbits:

- The Blend, the Flyer Enterprises coffee shop in the Ryan C. Harris Learning Teaching Center, had record sales on Monday — "better than finals week," said the barista.
- Residence education is sponsoring a contest for the iTunes playlist that best illustrates campus life in the aftermath of the storm.
- The estimated cost of roof and siding repairs after the storm: about \$500,000, said Beth Keyes, assistant vice president for facilities management.